

rich material for theoretical as well as empirical studies of civil society in complex transitional contexts. Sadly, in the volume under review there is little attempt to engage with such issues. The introductory essay by Frederick Starr cursorily acknowledges the historical evolution of the concept of 'civil society', but eschews any consideration as to how this might relate to Central Asian societies (or indeed, to other non-Western societies). Lacking a theoretical framework, or even any adequate definition of the key term, this collection of papers creates a curiously haphazard impression.

Several of the papers are devoted to the activities of non-governmental organizations. However, for the most part they focus on the successes or setbacks of foreign aid programmes in this sector. Moreover, the emphasis is on recommendations for future action rather than on questions of compatibility or effectiveness. The authors rarely touch on local responses, still less on indigenous traditions of social organization or community action. On a descriptive level, some of the information that is provided in individual papers (for example, on the source and size of foreign grants) is of some historical interest. However, taken as a whole, the contributions are so disparate that it is hard to gain any coherent picture of the situation within the region as a whole, or even within a particular state. There are only two papers that seek to explore an Islamic dimension. Aziz Niyazi in 'Islam and Tajikistan's human and ecological crisis' sketches a rather vague account of the history of Islam on the territory of Tajikistan, ranging over several centuries. Reuel Hanks, in 'Civil society and identity in Uzbekistan: the emergent role of Islam', defines his topic more narrowly. Yet the material that he presents is not only limited in scope, but is not analysed in sufficient depth for it to make any significant addition to existing literature on this subject. Furthermore, the author does not discuss Islamic approaches to civil society, hence it is difficult to understand quite what role he expects Islam to play in this situation.

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CAROLE BLACKWELL:

Tradition and society in Turkmenistan: gender, oral culture and song. xi, 203 pp. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001. £45.

Tradition and society in Turkmenistan makes an important contribution to the growing body of English-language studies on Central Asia. Prior to the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russian-trained scholars monopolized the research being conducted and published on the region. Quality was variable and publications were rarely translated into western-European languages. Translated material was often on the subject of archaeology and antiquities, and extremely few sources dealt with issues of contemporary culture and society in the republics. Local traditions, history and religious practices were heavily suppressed under Soviet rule, and their expression was limited to government-sponsored folkloric displays and architectural monuments. Blackwell's ethnographic-like study gives its readers a valuable glimpse into the politics of gender relations and the construction of (mainly female) identity, oral culture and a rich collection of the traditional songs performed by the women of Turkmenistan.

The book is based on field studies conducted between 1995 and 1997 when Carole Blackwell and her four children accompanied her husband on a two-year work assignment to Ashgabat. The focus of her research is on Turkmen

folk songs and what they reveal about the women, their traditions and their culture. She points out that in contrast to the heroism and abstract political nature of the men's songs, Turkmen women's songs are about 'the unremarkable acts of daily life' and importantly serve as a vehicle for expressing feelings that are otherwise silenced by a patriarchal society. Following Turkmen scholars, Blackwell has classified the songs into five types that each reveals something about the different stages of a woman's life cycle: beginning with the world of young girls, proceeding to brides, to young married women, and to motherhood, and concluding with the lamentations of old women. The songs have been passed down orally from generation to generation, and transcriptions for all of the songs that she includes in her book can be found in Turkmenbashi National Manuscript Institute. The book is divided into three parts. The first provides the general background for the author's project, for Turkmenistan, and for the folk songs. Part 2 contains more detailed chapters on religious beliefs, social and gender relations within the family, rites of passage, and the lives of the women in particular. The final and longest section of the book is dedicated to the folk songs and includes seventeen black-and-white photographic plates. After a brief introduction to the songs, part 3 is divided into five chapters dealing with the five life stages.

My main criticism of the book is that its overall scope is too ambitious and lacking a tangible theoretical focus. Blackwell correctly speculates in the introduction that 'the things these women say have obvious anthropological and sociological relevance' and 'could usefully be placed in a wider theoretical framework', but nevertheless admits that she has shunned this task. Though Lila Abu-Lughod's seminal study of Bedouin women and their stories appears in Blackwell's bibliography, there is no direct reference to, or development of, these highly relevant ideas in this book. In fact references to other scholarly and literary sources, including historical material, is scant, leaving the author's own observations and analysis seriously under-substantiated. Her almost complete reliance on song verses and excerpts from folktales to support claims about the contemporary lives of Turkmen women problematically suggests that they remain unaffected by the processes of historical change. Though it might be argued that lyrics and story lines have not changed over several generations, the author should formally recognize that they are employed by individuals to convey changing social values and aspirations, and these must be understood within an analytical framework that includes political, economic and social transformation.

Several of the key background chapters tend to suffer from fragmentation. The chapter on Turkmenistan reads partly as ethnography citing folktales and customs; partly as travel diary describing landscapes, experiences and the author's interpersonal contacts; and partly as history. Although the first two aspects hold interest in themselves, the region's fascinating history of silk-road exchange, tribes and empires, and Russian colonization is not rendered in a satisfying manner, and thus fails to develop fully the connection between the situation of Blackwell's contemporary informants with their nation's past. Likewise the presentation of Turkmen religion that combines Islam, Zoroastrianism, and local beliefs and customs, becomes anecdotal and a loosely structured account of family stories rather than an in-depth historical or sociological analysis of spiritual faith and practices.

The chapters that best prepare the reader for an appreciation of the material in part 3, and which present the most structured insights into the lives of women, are the two that describe 'family relationships' and 'rites of

passage'. The negotiated construction of female personhood is situated in a context of brothers, fathers and husbands, and Blackwell creatively weaves together the multiple dimensions of female sexuality with song verses, proverbs and folktales pertaining to the different cycles of women's lives. Though feminine identity is recognized as being complex and we are warned 'not to conclude from the emphasis given to the virtues of submissiveness and sexual passivity that all women feel powerless or joyless in their sexual relations', the author too frequently subscribes to these very idealized notions of female subservience in her gender depictions. Considerations of female empowerment would have been strengthened by a closer examination of power and resistance, including the ways in which women maintain and reproduce their existing privileges and territories within a male-dominated culture. The 'rites of passage' include interesting descriptions of ceremonies and traditions related to fertility and pregnancy, childhood, marriage, and death, and again Blackwell effectively punctuates her text with verses and folktales to emphasize the main points.

The real strength of this book lies in the documentation of 350 folk songs. Each English translation is accompanied by its original Turkmen version and is followed by a concise description of the meaning and some informatic social context for the song. Within each category of the life cycle there are further divisions that usefully address specific topics (for example, 'finding hope for the future' or 'the loneliness of the bride's parents' in the chapter on 'wedding songs'). This major section of the book promises to serve as a valuable resource for historians, anthropologists and sociologists working on Turkmenistan, or more generally for scholars working on gender identity and performance.

TREVOR H. J. MARCHAND

KAHAR BARAT (ed. and trans.):

The Uygur-Turkic biography of the seventh-century Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang, ninth and tenth chapters.

(Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, 166.) xxxiv, 430 pp.

Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2000.

\$79.

As an Uygur originally from the Chinese province of Xin-jiang, Kahar Barat is particularly well qualified to study the Uygur translation of the Chinese *Biography of Xuan-zang*; and indeed during the past decades he has devoted much of his research activity to this work.

The Uygur translation by Šingqo Šali Tutung of this seventh-century Chinese classic dates from about the second half of the tenth century. In 1930 or slightly before, an unidentified person somewhere in Xin-jiang found an almost complete copy of this Uygur translation, some 400 of the approximately 500 folios, probably buried in the ground where some 20 per cent of it had rotted. In 1930 some 240 folios of the manuscript were bought in Urumchi by a Chinese professor who sold them to the Beijing Library. About the same time or a little later, some ninety-four folios, now in the St. Petersburg Asian Institute, were purchased, probably by the Soviet consulate in Urumchi, and eight folios, now in the Beijing Library, were bought by Joseph Hackin 'while crossing Central Asia'. As to the 123 folios now in the Musée Guimet in Paris, I was told some years ago by Francis Macouin, the librarian in charge,